



# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES Tool Kit



## How You Can Work Toward Creating Healthy Communities



*A Policy Guide for Public Health Practitioners and Their Partners*

## CHAPTER 5

## WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

## MODELS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The suggestions and strategies offered in this chapter are a combination of thoughts offered by Peter Lagerway, Seattle Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator, along with practices and experiences gathered throughout Michigan. Volumes have been written on the topic of community coalition-building but, this is an attempt to distill the most appropriate tactics for your healthy-communities-related work. As is the case with all of this work, experience is the best teacher. Use these suggested approaches as a starting point, read from the resources included in the end of this chapter, talk to trusted colleagues who are leaders in this field, and then go and create your own stories.

“If we build it, they will come.” This may have worked for Kevin Costner’s character in the film *Field of Dreams*, but it may not necessarily be a recipe for success in the healthy-communities arena. “If we build it right, sometimes they will come” is more likely. A greater measure of success is garnered if



community members participate in the process. If community members are involved in planning their own healthy community and implementing specific projects, not only is “it” more likely to be built, but “they” will be much more likely to come.

Convincing a decision-maker that the public desires a proposed policy change (e.g., sidewalks, bike lanes, farmers’ markets, or smoke-free recreational areas) because it’s good for the health of the community, as well as individual residents, is a challenge. To do that, you must cultivate community involvement. While that may be one of the most difficult aspects of working to create

healthy communities, it may also be the most rewarding.

Your role as change agent and facilitator includes not just pushing the policy agenda, but engaging the community, educating its members about the benefits of healthy communities, letting residents educate you on how to do it, and partnering with them every step of the way. Most important of all, it is to convince the decision-makers of the public’s perception that a proposed policy change is in the best interest of the community. As with elected officials and decision-makers, nourishing and maintaining relationships with community members needs to happen. Here are three models for successful community participation: working in and with neighborhoods, partnering with special-interest groups, and strategies for working with advisory boards and commissions.

### Neighborhoods

A gold mine for any healthy-communities advocate is the neighborhood. In many Michigan neighborhoods, you will find a concern over “cut-through” traffic, speeding cars, a scarcity of places to walk and bike, few places to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, a lack of affordable housing, exposure to secondhand smoke in certain public places, a lack of safe places for children to play, or

a lack of access to healthy food choices. Without any encouragement, neighborhoods and other geographically defined groups will naturally take ownership of their issues, prioritize their needs, and demand action. Typically, many neighborhood improvements designed to solve safety or health issues will have the result of doing just that. For example, by implementing traffic-calming techniques such as sidewalks, on-street parking, street trees, and narrowing of lanes, walkers and cyclists benefit.

Some points to consider when working with neighborhood groups:

- Approach the group before issues arise. Clearly explain your community-health-related policies, providing persuasive reasons why creating more active, healthy and smoke-free communities benefits the neighborhood (all ages, genders, races).
- Provide key message points appropriate for this audience, as well as a realistic plan that pulls together the resources on that particular community in order to accomplish its goals.
- Keep your ear to the ground for opportunities. When an issue arises, contact the neighborhood and offer to be a resource. Sometimes a hot issue can rekindle a dwindling neighborhood association. Other times you may need to identify or cultivate leadership within the neighborhood. Often there is a “diamond in the rough” who just needs some encouragement to be the neighborhood leader who gets things done.

Following the same suggestions for working with elected officials, you will want to identify leaders, arrange for a meeting, and learn more about their issues. Discern how your interests may complement their issues: then offer to be a resource to find solutions. A word of caution here: don’t get overextended as the neighborhood resource. By balancing your goals with the group’s needs, you can ensure that you remain one of many resources and not the only person they turn to in time of need or crisis.

## **BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A HEALTHY-COMMUNITY COALITION**

### **What is a Coalition?**

In simplest terms, a coalition is a group of individuals or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal. That goal could be as narrow as obtaining funding for a specific intervention, or as broad as trying to permanently improve the overall quality of life for most people in the community. By the same token, the individuals and organizations involved might be drawn from a narrow area of interest, or might include representatives of nearly every segment of the community, depending on the breadth of the issue.

Coalition goals are as varied as coalitions themselves, but often contain elements of one or more of the following:

- Influencing or developing public policy, usually around a specific issue.
- Changing people’s behavior (reducing smoking or drug use, for instance).
- Building a healthy community. This term generally refers both to the community’s physical health (which may include not only medical and preventive or wellness services, but the environment, community planning, housing, hunger, substance abuse, and other factors) and to its social and psychological health (encompassing diversity, education, culture and the arts, violence prevention, youth development, employment, economic development, mental health and other human services, etc.).

### Why Start a Coalition (and Why Might it be Difficult)?

Consistency can be particularly important in addressing a community issue, especially if a number of organizations or individuals are already working on it. If their approaches all differ significantly, and they're not cooperating or collaborating, it can lead to a chaotic situation in which very little is accomplished. If, on the other hand, they can work together and agree on a common way to deal with the issue and on common goals, they're much more likely to make headway. There are a number of reasons why developing a coalition might be a good idea. In general terms, it can concentrate the community's focus on a particular problem, create alliances among those who might not normally work together, and keep the community's approach to issues consistent.

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Some more specific reasons for forming a coalition might include these:

- To address an urgent situation.
- To empower elements of the community, or the community as a whole, to take control of its future.
- To actually obtain or provide services.
- To bring about more effective and efficient delivery of programs and eliminate any unnecessary duplication of effort.

When discussing duplication of effort, "unnecessary" is a key word. In most instances, a number of organizations providing similar services, or services to the same population, are addressing a need greater than even all of them together can meet. The important thing here is to explore whether a unified approach can in some way increase or improve the services currently available.

- To pool resources.
- To increase communication among groups and break down stereotypes
- To revitalize the sagging energies of group members who are trying to do too much alone.
- To plan and launch community-wide initiatives on a variety of issues.
- To develop and use political clout to gain services or other benefits for the community.
- To create long-term, permanent social change.

### Barriers to Starting a Coalition

Barriers to starting a coalition often exist, and it's important to be aware of and anticipate them, because they may dictate the process that the coalition will have to follow in order to begin successfully. Among the most likely:

- **Turf issues.** Organizations are often very sensitive about sharing their work, their target populations, and especially their funding. Part of the work of starting a coalition may be to convince a number of organizations that working together will in fact benefit all of them and better address their common issues.

- **Bad history.** Organizations, individuals, or the community as a whole may have had past experiences that have convinced them that working with certain others—or working together at all—is simply not possible. A new coalition may have to contend with this history before it can actually start the work it needs to do.
- **Domination by “professionals” or some other elite.** All too often, agency people with advanced degrees, local politicians, business leaders, and others, in their rush to solve problems or to “help the disadvantaged,” neglect to involve the people most affected by the issue at hand and other community members. Creating a participatory atmosphere and reining in those who believe they have all the answers is almost always part of starting a coalition.

Part of a solution here may often be providing support for those who aren't used to the “professional” way of holding meetings and reaching conclusions, while at the same time training professionals and others to include those whose opinions are likely to be far more accurate and important to the solving of the problem than their own. This might mean bringing in an outside facilitator, or simply paying careful attention to guiding the process from within the group.

- **Poor links to the community.** A first step may have to be the development of hitherto nonexistent relationships among agencies and the community at large.
- **Minimal organizational capacity.** It might be necessary to find a coordinator, or for one or more individuals or organizations to find a way to share the burden of organization, for the new group if it is to develop beyond —or as far as —a first meeting.
- **Funding.** The difficulty of finding funding is an obvious obstacle. Less obvious are the dangers of available funding that pushes the coalition in the wrong direction or requires it to act too quickly to address the issue effectively. New coalitions have to be alert to funding possibilities from all quarters, and also have to be vigilant about the kind of funding they apply for and accept.
- **Failure to provide and create leadership within the coalition.** Coalitions demand a very special kind of collaborative leadership. If that leadership isn't available and can't be developed from within the coalition, its existence is probably at risk. It may be necessary to bring in an outside facilitator or training in collaborative leadership, or both to salvage the situation.
- **The perceived—or actual—costs of working together outweigh the benefits for many coalition members.** The task here may be to find ways to increase benefits and decrease costs for the individuals and organizations for whom this is the case if the coalition is to survive.

If you understand the potential barriers to forming a coalition in your community, you can plan for them and increase your chances of success.

### When Should you Develop a Coalition?

A coalition needs to have a purpose if it is to be successful. As discussed above, the purpose may be broad or narrow, but it's unlikely that a diverse group will come together unless there's a compelling reason to do so. At particular times, circumstances help to move the formation of coalitions.

1. **When dramatic or disturbing events occur in a community.**
2. **When new information becomes available.**
3. **When circumstances or the rules change.**
4. **When new funding becomes available.**



5. When there's an outside threat to the community.

6. When a group wishes to create broad, significant community change.

7. When you have not only a good reason for starting a coalition, but also the possibility that one *can* be successfully started in the community.

A coalition for social change can be a different proposition from one dedicated to much narrower or shorter-term goals. For one thing, social change takes time—years, or even decades, not months. Coalition members must make a commitment for the long run, and they—or their organizations, as individuals come and go—must honor that commitment.

A second point is that a social-change coalition must be held together by a coherent, shared vision. Such a vision is usually not possible without a group process that can articulate the vision and help others see it as a reachable goal.

Third, social-change coalitions must often settle for small gains that add up only over time. Members must be able to be satisfied with small victories and to weather the inevitable setbacks that sometimes cancel those victories out. Taking the long view is as important to successful social change as making a long-term commitment.

### Who Should be Part of a Coalition?

In general, the broader the membership of any coalition, the better, but there are certain people and groups whose representation on a coalition is absolutely essential.

**1. Stakeholders.** These are the people who have a stake in the success of the coalition's efforts. They can include:

- *Those most affected by the issue.* These may comprise current or potential participants in programs, people who lack such basic amenities as health insurance or decent housing, sufferers from particular diseases, or— in the case, for instance, of many environmental and public health issues—the community as a whole. It makes no sense, and is patently unfair, to make decisions that affect people's lives without including them in the process.
- *Formal and informal helpers, those charged with carrying out community functions related to the issue, and others affected by what the coalition might do.* The staffs of health and human service providers or other organizations and community agencies, police, school personnel, the probation and court system, local employers, landowners—some or all of these or many others may be directly or indirectly involved in the results of coalition initiatives.

**2. Community opinion leaders.** It's extremely useful to save seats at the table for those who can influence many others. Clergy, business or civic leaders, or people who are simply highly credible in the community may fall into this group.



Involving *emerging* leaders is equally important. These are people, often without a particular position, to whom others look for guidance. They may be leaders of volunteer efforts, youth highly respected by their peers, active parents, or just those with clear leadership potential. They are important to have on board, both for their ideas and energy and for the influence they wield and will wield as they become more widely known and respected in the community.

**3. Policymakers.** The participation of local political leaders, state representatives, and others in policy-making positions will both add credibility to your enterprise and increase the chances that you can actually influence policy in your area of interest.

### **How Do You Start a Community Coalition?**

So...you've decided that a coalition is indeed the way to go in your community. How do you actually go about starting one?

In addition to these specific groups, virtually any coalition can benefit from the membership of at least some concerned citizens who may have no direct connection to the issue at hand. Such people can both act as barometers of the attitudes of the community at large, and bring information back to the community that helps to explain the work of the coalition and give it a higher profile.

Another group that you might want to involve, but in a slightly different way, is the media. Rather than trying to get media members to join, you might want to contact them to publicize and cover your coalition and its efforts. If they join, there may be ethical limitations on the amount of coverage they can give you.

**1. Put together a core group.** You're probably already not alone in your concerns about the issue at hand, and you may already have a core group—a few individuals or organizations—ready to work at forming a coalition. If not, your first step is to find and make contact with those few individuals and organizations most involved with the issue.

Some reasons why a core group, rather than an individual, should lead the effort:

- A core group will have more contacts and more knowledge of the community than a single individual.
- It will give the idea of a coalition more standing among potential members.
- It will make finding and reaching potential members a much faster process.
- A core group will make the task easier on all the individuals involved, and therefore more likely to get done.
- It shows that the effort has wide support.

There are a few ways to approach assembling a core group:

- Start with people you know. If you're a longtime activist on this issue, or if you've been living or working in your community for a while, you have lots of contacts, particularly among others concerned with the same things you are. Use those contacts now, either to pull them into the circle or to get the names of others who might be part of a core group. Someone who knows you—assuming you have a positive relationship—is usually more easily persuaded than someone who doesn't.



- Contact people in agencies and institutions most affected by the issue. Pumpkinville Youth Services, in its drive to start a coalition on youth violence, went to both the chief of police and the superintendent of schools for support. As a result, a community affairs officer and an assistant superintendent both became part of the core group that set out to put the coalition together.
- Talk to influential people, or people with lots of contacts. These may be business or civic leaders, ordinary citizens with high credibility, or people such as the United Way director, whose job it is to know nearly everyone.

**2. Identify the most important potential coalition members.** Especially if your coalition has a narrow and time-limited purpose, there are probably people or organizations you can't do without. It's important to identify them and to target them specifically for membership. This may mean courting them—an initial meeting over lunch where you pick up the tab, for instance, or a promise of a place on the steering committee.

Try to recruit to the core group some members of the populace most affected by and concerned with the problem. A youth violence coalition should look for teens—perhaps gang members—to be core-group members; a homeless and housing coalition should try to recruit current or former homeless people. Incorporating such people into the core group will give you a built-in reality check, provide a link to the populace they represent, add credibility to your effort, and make clear your commitment to a participatory process.

Most of these individuals and organizations are referred to in “Who should be part of a coalition?” above, but each community is different. In yours, there may be a specific person among the target population, or a particular township official, without whom nothing can get done. The chances are you that—and if not you, then other members of the core group—know this person, or at least know who he or she is, and have some connection to him or her.

As mentioned earlier, none of this is to say that you shouldn't recruit many other people and organizations to your coalition as well. It simply means that you need to make a special effort to enlist these crucial members.

**3. Recruit members to the coalition.** Now that your core group is in place, and you've decided on the potential members who are necessary to the success of the coalition, you can start recruiting members. Although it's important to start with the individuals and groups mentioned above, you'll probably want to be as inclusive as possible. It's unusual to hear about a coalition suffering because it has too many members.

Use the networking capacity of your core group to the fullest. The core group can brainstorm a list of possible members, in addition to those deemed essential. Then each member can identify individuals on the list whom he or she knows personally, or organizations in which he or she has a personal contact. If names without a contact are left on the list, they can be divided among the members of the core group.

There are, obviously, a number of ways to contact people and organizations, including:

- Face-to-face meetings.
- Phone calls.
- E-mail.
- Personal letters.
- Mass mailings.
- Public-service announcements or ads in the media.
- Flyers and posters.

These are listed here in their approximate order of effectiveness, with direct personal contact being the best. It also takes longest, however, and probably should be reserved for those “must-haves” discussed earlier. Most people are likely to be recruited by phone.

Be sure to ask those you talk to for suggestions about other potential members, and try to have them make the contact. That will spread out the work, and also give the invitation more credibility, since it comes from someone the contacted person knows. If you are successful, you could end up contacting and recruiting several times the number of people and organizations on your original list.

When you contact people to recruit them to the coalition, make sure you have something substantive to offer or to ask them to do. An invitation to a first meeting—at a specific time and place far enough in the future that schedules can be arranged to fit it in—is perhaps the most common offer, but you could also, for instance, ask people to contact their state representative or to work with a small group. An appeal to join without something specific attached to it will often fall on deaf ears. People’s time is valuable, and they want to know that it won’t be wasted.

**4. Plan and hold a first meeting.** The first meeting of a coalition is important. If it’s a high-energy, optimistic gathering that gets people excited, you’re off to a good start. If it’s depressed and negative, or even just boring, it’s a good bet that a lot of people won’t come back. It’s up to the core group, in what may be the last official task they undertake, to plan a meeting that will start the coalition off on the right foot.



There are really two concerns here: the logistics of the meeting (where, when, how long, etc.) and its content.

There are a number of possibilities for the content of the first meeting. The agenda should depend on your particular issue and purposes, and on the needs of your community, but you’ll probably want to include some of the following:

- Introductions all around. Everyone present should give a brief statement of who they are, the organization, if any, with which they're connected, and the nature of their interest in the issue.
- Start defining the issue or problem around which the coalition has come together. This might mean the whole group’s coming up with an actual statement, or it might entail an initial discussion, followed by a small group’s being asked to draft a possible definition for the next meeting.
- Discuss the structure of the coalition. What kind of group will it be, how (if at all) will it be run, and what kinds of things will it actually do? Is hiring staff a reasonable goal, either currently or eventually?
- At least start the process of creating a common vision and agreeing on shared values about the coalition’s direction. This is the first step toward developing the vision and mission statements that will define the coalition and guide its work.
- Discuss a procedure for forming an action plan. Again, this may result in an actual, or at least a preliminary, plan, or it may lead either to the appointment of a smaller group to draft a plan or to the establishment of a procedure by which the larger group will generate a plan over a set period of time.

- Review the things to be done before the next meeting, and who has agreed to do them. As mentioned above, it's important that people leave the first meeting feeling that something has been accomplished. If tasks are being worked on, and specific results are expected at the next meeting—even if those results are simply statements or preliminary plans to react to—coalition members will have that feeling of accomplishment.
- Schedule at least the next meeting. It may be possible to develop a regular meeting schedule at this first meeting, or it may make more sense to schedule only the next meeting and wait until the membership stabilizes and some other people join before creating a long-term schedule.

**5. Follow up on the first meeting.** You've held a successful first meeting—terrific! The job of building a coalition has only begun, however. First, you have to follow up to make sure that there will be a well-attended second meeting at which work can continue.

The list that follows is one for whoever is actually putting the coalition together. That may be an individual, a core group, a staffer, or even a new coalition governing body of some sort. Whoever it is, someone has to be responsible for keeping an eye on the larger picture and making sure that the jobs get done. Without some level of coordination from somewhere, it's very unlikely that a coalition will survive and succeed.

- Distribute the minutes of the first meeting and reminders about the next meeting to those who attended, and send them out with invitations to potential new members as well. Try to widen your net as much as possible. Get to the folks you missed the first time, or to those whose names you've gotten from people who attended the first meeting.
- Follow up on the groups or individuals who are working on tasks assigned at the first meeting. Offer help, attend meetings, try to involve other people with relevant skills or knowledge—do everything you can to make sure those tasks get accomplished.
- If committees or task forces are forming, try to recruit new members for them. The real work of the coalition will probably be done in these small groups, so it's important that they have the right members. If you know people with expertise who could be used in particular ways, grab them. Most people will respond if they're asked, especially if they're asked because you value what they bring to the task.
- Keep looking for new coalition members.
- Keep track of the fundamental building blocks of the coalition that aren't in place yet. If the group hasn't yet decided on a structure or a coordinating body, you need to make sure that the decision doesn't get pushed aside, but that it's either in the works or being actively considered. If there's no action on an action plan, you need to provide the push to get it going.

**6. Next steps.** A number of specific things—some of which you've already started in that first meeting—need to be done to make sure that the coalition keeps moving forward.

- Gather information. In order to plan for action, you need as much information about the problem or issue, and about the community, as possible. Many organizations, particularly those most involved with the issue at hand, are likely to have statistics or other data on hand. The U.S. Census can be a good source of demographic information, as can local colleges or universities and local government departments. The more information you can gather, the easier it becomes to define the problem, to know if you're addressing something that's actually a major community issue, and to plan a strategy that will effectively address it.

- Finish creating vision and mission statements. These can be hashed out in a small group after everyone has had input in a larger meeting, or you can actually try to generate them in the larger group itself (perhaps by splitting people up into smaller groups, then coming back together to reconcile differences). It's important that there be agreement on the wording and intent of these statements because they will be the foundation of the coalition, referred to again and again over time as the group tries to decide whether to tackle particular issues. Everyone has to feel ownership of them if the coalition is to develop an identity.
- Complete an action plan. The coalition's action plan is, obviously, intertwined with both its structure and its vision and mission. In practice, coalitions often start with a sense of what they need to do, and their structures, visions, and missions grow from that.
- Finish the work of designing a structure for the coalition. Again, this has to be a shared task, with everyone having a chance to contribute ideas. There is such a broad range of possibilities here—from practically no governance to a very clear, formal hierarchy—that it's crucial that the group come up with a form that everyone can live with. Once a structure has been agreed on, there may still be the need for writing bylaws and otherwise formalizing it.
- Elect officers, or a coordinating or steering committee. Once there's agreement about the structure of the coalition, it's time for members to decide whether they want some sort of governing body, and to choose it so that the work of the coalition can go ahead.
- Examine the need for professional staff. Depending on the scope of its work plan, a coalition may feel that it needs professional staff—at least a coordinator—to be effective. If it has the resources, a community coalition may be able to hire a full- or part-time coordinator. Or it may see the need for one and set out to find the resources. In addition to direct grants to the coalition, one or more member organizations may be able to provide funding, or employers or other elements of the community may be willing to fund all or part of a coordinator's salary if the work of the coalition is relevant to their concerns.
- Determine what other resources (financial, material, informational, etc.) you need, develop a plan for getting them, and decide who's going to be responsible for carrying it out. If you already have funding for a paid staff person, finding resources may be one of his or her primary responsibilities...or it may not. A committee of the coalition may have that responsibility, or someone may simply take it on. Part of creating a strategic plan that encompasses your vision, mission, and action plan is looking at the resources you'll need to reach your goals and planning for obtaining those resources.
- Start the hard work of maintaining the coalition over time. Once your coalition is a going concern, it still needs care and feeding. After it's been around for a while and had some success, people may start to take it for granted, or the original members may start to burn out or to get stale. Careful maintenance for the long term is an extremely important task.

**7. Some general guidelines for getting a coalition off the ground.** In addition to the specifics mentioned above, there are some more general elements to starting a coalition:

- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Make sure that lines of communication within the coalition and among the coalition, the media, and the community are wide open. Open communication will ensure that no one feels left out of the loop, and that everyone has the information necessary to make coalition efforts successful. Good communication with the media and the community will increase your chances for publicity and support when you need them.
- Be as inclusive and participatory as you can. Work at making the coalition a group in which anyone in the community will feel welcome, and continue to invite people to join after the first



meeting. Try to involve everyone in the coalition in generating vision and mission statements, planning, and major decisions. The more that people feel ownership of the coalition itself, the harder they'll be willing to work to achieve its goals, and the less likely they'll be to allow turf issues or minor conflicts to get in the way of the coalition's progress.

- Network like crazy. Try to involve, or at least to keep informed, as many other groups in the community as possible. Let them know what you're doing, invite them to coalition meetings (to make presentations, if appropriate, or just to see what's going on), invite them to join if they're interested, educate them about the issue. If groups in the community are informed about your work, they're more likely to be supportive and to tell others about what you're doing as well. They may also have better connections to policymakers than you have, and may be able to help you approach them.
- Try, at least at the beginning, to set concrete, reachable goals. Success is great glue— achieving reachable goals early can help a coalition develop the strength to later spend the years it may take to pursue and achieve long-term goals.
- Be creative about meetings. Community activists and health and human service workers often feel that they spend their whole lives in meetings. If each coalition meeting can be different, and have some elements of fun to it, you'll be much more likely to retain both membership and interest in the coalition. Some possibilities include rotating the responsibility for meetings among the groups comprising the coalition; having only a few meetings a year, each with a particular theme, and doing most of the work of the coalition in committees or task forces; and regularly bringing in exciting presentations on the issue or in areas that relate to it.
- Be realistic, and keep your promises. If you're not sure you can do it, don't say you will. If you say you will, be sure you do.
- Acknowledge diversity among your members, and among their ideas and beliefs. Your coalition will probably mirror the cultural, economic, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of your community, and will certainly represent a diversity of opinion. Not everyone will agree with everything the coalition does or wants to do, and sometimes the minority opinion will be right. Make sure to take everyone's opinion and restraints into account, and to use diversity as a spur to discussion, rather than a source of division.



By the same token, it's important that there be a mechanism for getting things done when there is a disagreement, whether it's a majority vote or something else. A long-term disagreement over strategy or tactics can permanently hang up a coalition, and make it totally ineffective.

- Praise and reward outstanding contributions and celebrate your successes. In addition to success itself, the celebration of success is a great way to cement the bonds among members of a coalition. Whether through individual or group awards, or through parties or other events, celebration of achievement will help your coalition thrive, and will give you a much-needed opportunity to remember that there's a reason you're doing all this.



## To Sum Up

In situations with issues that are too large and complex for a single organization to address, a coalition of groups and individuals working together may be the solution. A coalition can develop a coordinated response to an issue, increase the efficiency of service delivery, pool community resources, create and launch community-wide initiatives, build and wield political clout to influence policy, and work effectively toward long-term social change.

Coalitions may form in response to:

- Significant or disturbing community events.
- New information.
- Changes in circumstances or regulations.
- The availability of funding.
- An outside threat to the community.
- The need to create significant change in the community.

Whatever the reason, coalitions can form only when the possibility—in the form of mutual trust and a perceived need—exists. A coalition should encompass all stakeholders—those affected by the work of the coalition and by the issue it addresses—as well as community-opinion leaders, policymakers, and community members at large.

To start a coalition, it's best to begin with a core group and work outward, pulling in the necessary members mentioned above, as well as a more general membership from the community and from other, more peripherally involved organizations. Holding an exciting first meeting at which real accomplishments are achieved and the work of the coalition is set in motion will help to successfully launch the enterprise.

Even more important is following up before the second meeting to make sure that groups are doing the work they said they would do, that attendance won't fall off, and that new members will be added. Areas that must be addressed are:

- An agreed-upon definition of the issue or problem that the coalition is addressing.
- The creation of vision and mission statements.
- The development of an action plan.
- The design of a structure for the coalition.
- The need for professional staff.
- Resources.

Finally, you have to continue to pay attention to some general rules for forming and running a coalition:

- Communicate openly and freely with everyone.
- Be inclusive and participatory.
- Network at every opportunity.
- Set reachable goals, in order to engender success.
- Hold creative meetings.
- Be realistic about what you can do: don't promise more than you can accomplish, and always keep your promises.
- Acknowledge and use the diversity of the group.

A coalition can be a powerful force for positive change in a community. If you can form one that lasts and addresses the issues it was meant to, you've done a major piece of community-building work.

## Why is Maintaining the Coalition Important?

Let's admit that starting a coalition, or any other group, can be challenging. It takes skill, sensitivity,

timing, persistence, faith; it brings out the best in you. Yet challenging though it sometimes may be, start-up is only half the battle. Truthfully, it's probably less than half. For now that the coalition is standing on its own two feet, it needs to start striding toward its community goals. Those accomplishments lie in the future. To ensure a successful future, the coalition needs to stay alive and healthy. To stay alive and healthy, it needs to be maintained.

### **What Needs to Be Maintained?**

What needs to be maintained are the key structures, functions, and relationships of the coalition that helped get it started in the first place. For a coalition, the key ingredients are social and include:

- The coalition's reason for being—its vision, mission, and objectives.
- The basic governance and operating rules of the coalition.
- The coalition leadership.
- The coalition membership.
- The division of labor, within and among the leaders and members.
- The coalition's strategic and action plans, both short- and longer-term.
- The coalition's actions and results, so that it is accomplishing something (what it means to) in the world.
- The coalition's funding, so that those accomplishments can be continued.
- The coalition's visibility in the larger community.
- The coalition's public support.
- And finally, what might be called the spirit of the coalition, the good feelings and relationships among all involved, which are a fundamental precondition for the coalition's continued existence. This point is addressed at greater length later in this section.

### **How Do You Maintain a Coalition?**

The first steps in maintaining a coalition, or any other group, take place inside the mind of the coalition group member. They are internal. To state them as specific guidelines:

**1. Develop the awareness that maintenance is necessary.**

**2. Make a decision to engage in it.**

These internal steps are in some ways the hardest part of the entire process. But once you—as individual members and then as a group—have taken them, and made the decision to create and implement a maintenance plan, you are well on your way.

**3. Design a maintenance plan.**

**4. Carry out your maintenance plan.**

Suppose you have the awareness and have made the decision. Let's think about the next question: How do you put a maintenance plan together? (Note the assumption here again: A maintenance plan will help you, rather than doing maintenance by the seat of the pants.) In designing your plan, you have a number of choices to make at the very beginning. Each is detailed below.

### **DESIGN A MAINTENANCE PLAN**

#### **Who Should Design the Plan?**

Among your options: The plan can be designed by the coalition's leaders; or a subgroup of the leaders; or a subgroup of members chosen by the leaders; or by the larger membership itself.

In most cases, the leaders should take responsibility for setting the wheels in motion; but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have to drive the work themselves. They can delegate it, and often the best

way to go is to select a few key experienced members who are interested in maintenance and have the time to plan it. Usually, a small group will work best. The plan can be presented to the leadership, then to the larger membership for review and comment, and then for revision as might be needed.

The plan's details will depend on what kind of coalition or group you are. If you have five or six regular active members (and even a coalition that small can be effective), chances are that one or two people are going to take the lead. But when 5 or 6 become 50 or 60, you have the luxury of forming a larger committee to plan what is needed and perhaps carry it out.

### **How Comprehensive Should the Plan Be?**

Should the plan, and therefore the actual maintenance, include all aspects of the way the coalition runs, or just several?

Your choice will again depend on the resources and the particulars of your group. But when you start, a good general guideline may be to take a middle path. That is, maintenance for you may not mean attention to the refreshments served at meetings, but it may in fact mean close attention to the format and content of the meetings themselves.

In other words, make the work feasible for you, something you feel comfortable taking on. It's good to challenge yourself a little, but don't overwhelm yourself at the beginning.

### **How Formal Should the Plan Be?**

You can have loose-leaf notebooks full of maintenance procedures and schedules (as maintenance teams for machines such as elevators would), or you can write things down on a scratch pad. You can keep detailed records, or no records at all. You can do maintenance simply through oral discussion, or with hardly any discussion whatsoever. A mental note might do the job, but so might computerized systems.

Once again, the possibilities vary, and your choices will depend on the size and nature of your group. And once again, a middle path may make the most sense for most groups, at least at the start. Informality can lead to sloppiness, but excess formality to rigidity. As a rule, the level of formality of the work should be in harmony with the level of formality of your coalition or group. If it's a step or two more formal, that might not be a bad idea.

### **Who Should Carry Out the Plan?**

Briefly, your options here are similar to those for maintenance plan design: the coalition leaders themselves, a subgroup of the leaders, a subgroup of members chosen by the leaders, with variations throughout.

Three additional guidelines may help:

First, the people carrying out the plan may be the same as those designing it, but not necessarily; the implementers should generally have a strong voice in plan design, but the planners and the implementers need not always be the same people.

Second, implementation of the plan usually works best when the work responsibilities are divided up according to function—that is, not very surprisingly, the membership chair will typically have the lead role in recruiting and keeping new members; the publicity chair will take the lead in maintaining publicity efforts; and so on down the line.

Third, implementation will always be more successful if there are clear lines of accountability, no matter who is doing the actual implementation work. Not to pick on him or her, but to whom is that membership chair accountable? We know that the chair is a wonderfully creative and responsible

person—but even so, we would like to establish accountability to someone other than oneself. It's just that organizations work better that way.

### **How Frequently Should Maintenance Take Place?**

The theoretical choices range from daily to never, with all stops in between. A guideline: Not so often that you spend too much time in this effort relative to other coalition tasks, and not so often that there is unlikely to be any change since the last review; but not so infrequently that previously undetected problems may have arisen.

What does this mean in practice? A yearly review—give or take—will work well for many groups. Anything less may be too little. More frequent reviews can be given to past problem areas calling for special attention. In general, the maintenance schedule need not be the same for all aspects of the coalition's work—some aspects may be reviewed more frequently and others less.

The answers to these questions above may imply that there are many ways to design and carry out a maintenance plan, and that there is no one way to do maintenance that is head and shoulders above the rest. This is true. The best way to do maintenance will depend on the nature, history, composition, and goals of your particular group, as well as its plans, and its commitment to do maintenance work. Consider also these criteria: Whatever your maintenance choice, it must be something that is workable for you, that you can implement in daily practice, and that you and your coalition can feel good about.

Suppose, though, that you have now made your choices. How do you go about carrying them out? How should you actually conduct maintenance in practice? This leads to Step 4:

*Carry out your maintenance plan.* Once again, you have options for doing so. They include:

### **External Reviews**

These are reviews by outside reviewers or consultants. Sometimes they may be mandated by your funding source. Such external reviews can vary among themselves:

- The reviewers can be paid professionals from outside the community, or a single local volunteer.
- The reviewers can review your policies, practices, and accomplishments across the board. Or they can survey smaller and more limited practices.
- The reviews can last several hours or several days.
- The external reviews can be combined with internal reviews, as noted below.

In any case, the criteria used to conduct a review should be clear to everyone. Ideally, they should be worked out in advance, together with the reviewers. There should be no surprises.

External or outside reviews are relatively rare for coalitions, though less rare for other types of groups.

Not surprisingly, they have their own advantages and disadvantages. They can be expensive. The reviewers may not have good understanding of your organization, and may be using different criteria from yours. The value of the review will be only as good as the expertise, sensitivity, and communication skills of the reviewers.

On the other hand, such a review can provide a helpful outside perspective, by seeing your operations with a fresh pair of eyes and by giving you insights that you might not otherwise have had. That review can also lend objectivity and sometimes specific expertise. And sometimes it can also be free, especially if it is mandated from the outside.

All the other maintenance procedures noted below are internal, conducted by the people in the coalition itself.

## Internal Reviews

**1. Formal reviews.** What makes them “formal”? They have their own policies and procedures; they take place on a regular basis; they are institutionalized in the culture of the coalition; they are likely to produce a written report.

Formal reviews can also vary:

- They can take the form of an annual program review, with its own predetermined methods. A meeting of the executive committee or other governing group can be set aside for it.
- Or instead of a self-review conducted by the whole group, a subcommittee or designated group may be charged with conducting the review and reporting its findings to the whole group (reporting out). This report would then be discussed by the larger governing group.
- The review can also be done at a membership meeting of the full group. Or a report prepared by others can be made to the full membership at that meeting for discussion.
- Sometimes the review is not of the entire operations of the coalition, but of some of its specific practices—publicity, budget, etc. This more limited type of review can also be done by the full group, or a subgroup, with reporting out as noted above.
- It’s also possible to rotate a series of smaller reviews, so that one aspect of the coalition’s work is reviewed (and maintained) every year or every few months. In this way, maintenance proceeds on a staggered schedule: this month, funding; next fall, membership review; and so on.

Your coalition or group can decide to carry out any of these types of reviews. Once that decision is made, then it’s a matter of setting up procedures to make sure the review is implemented, completed, and utilized.

**2. Informal reviews.** Maintenance does not always have to be a formal procedure, with structured agendas, clipboards, checklists, and written reports. A coalition can decide upon and carry out less structured ways of collecting the information it needs to see how things are going. For example:

*Feedback at scheduled meetings.* A natural opportunity for informal review and maintenance is at the end of scheduled meetings. So, for example, a short portion of each general meeting can be devoted to feedback. (“Any comments on this meeting?” “Are we going about things in the right way?” “How did you feel about the way things went?” “Were you happy with what we accomplished today?”) The same can apply to other types of meetings, such as executive committee and subcommittee meetings.

*Feedback by mail, e-mail, or telephone.* From time to time, a postcard can be sent to coalition members asking them for feedback on certain aspects of coalition performance and soliciting for suggestions for improvement. This process can be accomplished by e-mail as well, or sometimes over the telephone.

*Retreats.* These are usually extended meetings for the full coalition staff held away from the coalition’s usual place of business (sometimes at a special retreat center), and sometimes led by an outside facilitator. Their purpose is often to review, maintain, and refresh the group’s work, though retreats can also be held to design new plans, or to consider a specific topic or challenge. Their potential advantage is the freshness of the setting, the freedom from daily distractions, the expectation of new accomplishment, and the mental preparation that occurs before the event.

*Daily communication.* The process of maintaining your coalition can also be part of daily communication, although one might not call it “maintenance” or a “review” as such. In this sense, maintenance is a part of almost everything you do. Voicing an opinion without fear of personal criticism, keeping members posted about what is going on, giving personal support if someone is



having a bad day—each of these little acts maintains the coalition, even though one might not give them a “maintenance” label. These small transactions, multiplied over months and years, sustain the energy and spirit of the coalition’s work.

Keep in mind that any of these methods can be combined with any other. Feedback at meetings can be combined with feedback by mail. Regular strong internal communication can be combined with occasional retreats. Maintenance of a coalition can (and should) occur in many different ways.

### **KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE**

We’ve spoken about maintenance so far almost as if it’s mostly step-by-step, almost by-the-numbers. In some ways it is, and in some ways it should be. But there’s another part of maintenance that is much harder to reduce to action steps—namely, keeping the spirit of the coalition alive.

That is, people join groups to get things done, but also to have a pleasant time in so doing. Getting work done is essential; yet if belonging to the coalition is all work and no play, then it can become drudgery. The member thinks: Life is full of options; why should I give energy to something that is routine and cheerless, and that doesn’t really make me feel good? Sooner or later, quite possibly sooner, such members (whether paid or volunteer?) will leave.

The wise coalition leader, then, will make the coalition a happy place to be. He or she will build in some fun—some times to relax, push all work to one side, and simply enjoy one another’s company. Going out to eat, throwing a surprise birthday party, having a cookout, taking some group time off for no particular reason, finding regular reasons to celebrate—these are examples of events that keep members connected to the coalition. Members stay involved not just because of the work, but because they feel affirmed as full human beings, because their human spirit is nourished.

All this is part of coalition maintenance, just as much as any itemized review process.

Leaders, take note.

### **What are Alternatives to Maintenance? Some Other Coalition Directions**

Maintaining the coalition is important; maintaining the coalition may even be crucial, which is why we’ve spent so much time discussing it. But we haven’t yet mentioned one essential point: Maintaining the coalition, in the sense of doing what you’ve done before, may not be what you want to do.

For people change, and so do groups. Community situations change; so do community needs. Coalitions are not immune from change, and your coalition may want to change with the times. Simple maintenance, holding on to the status quo, is not your only option.

What are the other options? You can grow; or spin off something new; or change your focus; or cut back; or simply end. Your coalition has choices. You can pursue any one of these options, or several of them at different times. But which option should you choose, and how should you go about choosing it? We’ll consider these options in turn, along with some of the conditions that might be favorable for each one.

*(Much of what follows is adapted from **The Spirit of the Coalition**, by Bill Berkowitz and Tom Wolff; see **Additional Resources at the end of this chapter.**)*

## Growing

You can grow. This is a natural tendency of groups and organizations, especially if they are doing well.

And suppose you are doing well. Suppose, too that the previously suggested maintenance checks have been completed to most people's satisfaction. Then why not do more of what you're doing, or branch out or up? You have successfully taken on some tasks; how about some more? Or how about a new challenge, in a different area?

Coalition growth may be the right way for you to go:

- When the coalition has a track record of stability.
- When it has a track record of success.
- When the community need is present.
- When the resources (people, money, and time) to sustain you will be present as well.
- When your members want to grow.
- When the community wants that, too.

But when you start thinking about growing, look before you leap, or even step. It's helpful for your coalition to know some of the dangers that may come with expansion:

1. If you grow bigger, you will need more resources to sustain you.
2. Growth also puts more pressure on the coalition leadership. The leadership and membership have limits, and can do only so much—even though growth can also mean new opportunities for the coalition that are difficult to pass up.
3. As the coalition becomes bigger, more visible, and more accepted in the community, there can be pressure to become administrators of community services, to actually run them. This can take you away from your planning, coordinating, and catalytic roles. You may not necessarily want to be a direct services provider.
4. Finally, if you grow, you can get spread too thin. And then you start feeling the strain of overload. Even if you can manage the strain, the quality of what you do begins to deteriorate. In this sense, there is danger in success, for it can steer you toward failure.

*Resolving the issue of growth.* While all these issues surrounding growth should make you stop and think, they are resolvable. The resolution begins by realizing that growth is not all or nothing. The issue is not simply grow or stay stagnant, or to grow or die. Your growth can instead be targeted and controlled. You can choose the degree to which you want to grow, when you want to do it, in what respects, and how. You can engage in a form of coalition career-planning.

When you do, it always helps if you build from a stable base. One coalition leader put it this way:

“We need to be strong with what we already have, and be certain that growth is in a healthy and productive direction, before we start tinkering in new areas. Each time we grow, we're starting all over again. For us to start a whole new area, it's probably going to take some time for us to learn to do it right, and I'd like to make our current work more solid before we start approaching anything else.”

So in a nutshell: If you choose to grow, you want to be in control of the process, and not let the process be in control of you. With thought, you can do this; and with experience and practice, your decisions about growth can become both easier and more productive.

### **“Spinning Off”**

Growth—planned and controlled—may be a goal for your coalition, and a sensible and wise one. But choosing growth is not the only possibility. Whatever new initiatives the coalition takes on need not be permanent; they can be temporary. That is, you can take on something new, get it started, and then let it go.

This is what we mean by “spinning off.” It is similar to incubating a program until it is strong enough to survive on its own. Or it’s like being a mother bird until the fledgling gets its wing feathers and is ready to fly.

Spinning a program off may be desirable:

- When a particular community need continues to exist.
- When your coalition has addressed that need, but doesn’t want to do so any more.
- When another group is wanting to (or willing to) and also able to perform that task

Coalitions cannot handle all community needs, and so it often makes sense to hand the glory, and the headaches, over to someone else. Yet when you spin something off, there can be problems. One key concern is “parental responsibility.” How far does your responsibility extend? How long do you keep your attachment? You don’t want to hang on too long because that’s an energy drain on you. Yet you certainly don’t want to let go too soon, either.

A different but equally relevant concern: It’s also true that if you send the new venture out on its own, you take your chances. Your child might turn out to be ungrateful. The project could come back to haunt you.

Spinning off new programs—and seeking to develop new programs precisely so that they can be spun off—is often an excellent choice. True, success is not guaranteed. But to increase your chances of success, when you spin something off, you can do set up conditions and make the rules of future engagement clear. You can agree to provide technical assistance and consultation. You can stipulate as best you can what you will and will not do.

Still, the reality is that when you spin a program off, it’s largely out of your control—which is often part of the reason you wanted to spin it off in the first place. It’s helpful to accept that reality. More often than not, you can’t have it both ways.

### **Changing Focus**

An effective coalition does not have to grow, and it does not have to spin off new programs. It can simply change its focus. This may be a good idea when the original objectives of the coalition have been met, and when the coalition membership and leadership are motivated to take on other tasks. If you originally came together to improve public transportation, for example, and new bus lines are now running, you might choose to tackle job training (because people can now more easily get to good jobs). Or you could focus on youth employment, or affordable health care, or virtually anything else that is needed.

### **Cutting Back**

In a different scenario, suppose a coalition hits tough times, external or internal, economic or psychological. Or suppose another group in the community emerges that seems to be providing the same functions, and providing them well. If either of these situations comes along, and if they are severe or prolonged, you can downsize. You can simply cut back.

There may be good reasons to do so. You may need to consolidate a little after some healthy growth. You may have grown too fast, and need to make some readjustments. A large grant may be coming to an end. Some other group may now be willing to take over an activity that's been an albatross around your neck—or maybe your albatross is a fledgling that is finally ready to leave the nest by itself. Under these circumstances, cutting back could be a reasonable idea, at least for the moment. It weeds out inefficiencies, brings you back to basics, and prompts you to think more carefully about priorities.

These types of events, like others in the paragraphs above, are all normal events in a coalition's development. And as a reminder, neither growth nor downsizing has to be forever. If you cut back now, that doesn't mean you'll never grow again. The evolutionary path of coalitions, and of social systems, is usually not a straight line.

### **Ending**

You can also decide to end, and simply stop operating. This is often a sad event, but it doesn't have to be.

Coalitions are not immortal, nor are they expected to be. A coalition can simply outlive its own usefulness and decide to disband. The once-burning need may now be an ember. The leaders and members may have taken on new assignments, or changed their life priorities, or gotten sick, or moved away. And if the initial impetus or funding for starting the coalition came from the outside (perhaps from grant money), the impetus and the funding may now have shifted.

If the goal or mission has by now been accomplished, we can say congratulations for a job well done. Even if some goals have not been reached, and even if things must end semi-voluntarily or not voluntarily at all, the coalition's effort may nevertheless have made a difference. What's more, should the need flare up again, the coalition could spring back to life. In any case, new coalitions may arise later on, sometimes with some of the same members, and be better off because of your trailblazing efforts.

### **Staying the Way You Are**

One more option: You can simply keep going the way you are. If you've been doing something well, why not continue it in just the same way? Your coalition may want to do so when it has built a track record of success, when the original need still exists, when community support is stable, when things are going well, when both leaders and members (and community members) are satisfied with the status quo, and when both leaders and members choose to maintain it

Staying the same sounds easy; it seems reasonable; but it is among the hardest options to carry out. The outer world, and your inner world, changes. There are ongoing, constant pressures to move in one direction or the other: to grow, or do something different, or fold your tent. To make a conscious choice to stay the same, and to maintain that choice regardless of those pressures, and stay steady as she goes—that isn't easy to do.

It can be a laudable thing to do, and preferable as well. But it's not necessarily the best thing to do, either. The danger is that you can grow stale, or smug, or increasingly less relevant, or wither on the vine. Change often brings energy, a rekindling of the spirit. If you stay the way you are, you need to ensure that the underlying spirit of the coalition will be sustained.

To restate a major theme: Will your coalition be better off changing in some way? It might, or it might not; there's no single answer. Your answer should depend on assessment of your coalition's and your community's present needs, desires, resources, support, and accomplishments, weighed against the

costs and benefits of other options available to you. Let's clarify this point in the next part of our discussion.

**To sum it up: The maintenance of coalitions in practice**

We have treated these different coalition directions as independent options, but that has been partly for purposes of exposition. In practice, the options swirl closer together, with the predominant pattern changing, like weather systems passing overhead.

The reality of coalition maintenance and evolution lies closer to this: You keep going because you're doing some good. You have some core functions. Perhaps you take on something new from time to time, wisely or not. Maybe that something dies on its own. Maybe somebody else kills it; but maybe it works, and you keep it. Or maybe you spin it off, so that it can stand on its own. New opportunities like that keep coming along every so often. You can choose among them.

How can those choices best be made? To answer that question, it will help to reflect on and review the key elements that ultimately maintain and sustain both coalitions and any other social organization:

**Accomplishment**

First, of course, is accomplishment. If the coalition, if any organization, is doing good work and that work is recognized, the community is much more likely to support it. New members, and new funding, are easier to come by. Success is reinforcing. So if the coalition (and its leadership) can find a way to keep generating positive events, other things will tend to fall into place. And this applies **regardless** of whether the coalition chooses to grow or contract or move in a different direction.

**Institutional Consciousness**

A second key element is an institutional consciousness. This means that the coalition and its members believe and act as if they are an integral part of community life, a prominent and constant feature on the local landscape. The larger community feels the same way. The coalition has a sense of permanence. It's here to stay; everyone knows it. It's become institutionalized.

To develop an institutional consciousness takes strong and committed coalition leadership. (Accomplishment helps, too.) But it also takes effective coalition **structures**. Members need to know that attendance at each monthly meeting is expected, that they are expected to serve on at least one task force, that elections will be held on the last Wednesday in September, and that the first post-election business will be a coalition action plan. These or equivalent structures, reliably and repeatedly utilized, strengthen allegiance. Over time, they deepen the coalition's roots. *Institutionalization*, that five-dollar word, basically means "rootedness"—even though the coalition's roots, like the roots of a tree, lie below the surface.

**Positive Spirit**

Good works and good structure are two essential elements maintaining any coalition. But finally, what you also want to maintain are good **feelings**—the positive spirit that brought people together and kept them coming together in the first place. The personal closeness, the cohesion, the camaraderie are hard to overestimate. We spend our personal time where we feel comfortable, accepted, and valued for who we are. Why should we think that our own coalition members would feel, or act, any differently?

After the coalition is established, it may choose among many different maintenance options. The key point about coalition maintenance is that there are genuine choices; it's best to choose consciously. You can maintain the momentum of your coalition, speed it up, or slow it down. You can determine



the direction of your coalition and keep or change it in the way that you and your coalition members see fit, rather than be at the mercy of outside factors.

The choices you make will depend upon your particular coalition's history, personality, assets, community needs, environmental factors, and available time. Many choices are justifiable, and many different choices may be made over a coalition's life span. And your maintenance choices here are ongoing, meaning that your best choice today might not be your best choice tomorrow -which is part of what makes community work exhilarating, challenging, and fun. But maintaining or changing the coalition, like most other areas of community practice, is up to you.

If your coalition is doing good work, it will probably choose to sustain it, in one form or another. Continued accomplishment, institutionalized structures, and vibrant spirit will help you maintain your efforts and your successes. These coalition needs are interrelated, and they are continuous; they never go away. A wise coalition leader, like the one quoted below, will come into alignment with these principles of coalition life.

"Coalition building is a very lengthy process, and it's one that doesn't always go smoothly or according to anybody's pre-established time line. People in coalitions need to remember that, and to accept that, and not be disappointed that things don't go as quickly as they want to. As each new member comes in, it changes the whole dynamic and the whole focus, and that's part of it. It's constantly evolving. The coalition never has an end in sight, not unless you want to disband it. It just doesn't have an end. It constantly changes. You just have to keep going and plugging away. That's just the nature of it..."

*Information contained in this chapter was adapted from the University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development's Community Tool Box at ([ctb.ku.edu/](http://ctb.ku.edu/)).*

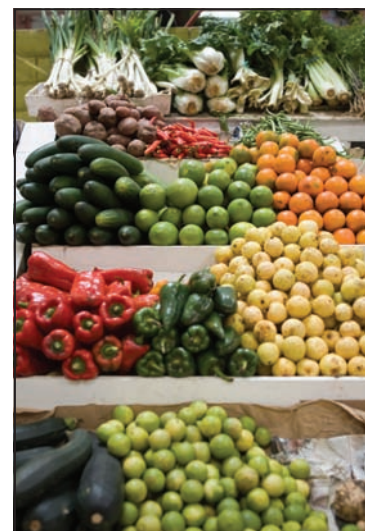
## HEALTHY COMMUNITY AND TOBACCO REDUCTION COALITION SUCCESSES

### Healthy-Community Coalition Successes

**During 2005, a total of 15 community coalitions in Michigan received grants to create environmental and policy changes. Of those health coalitions, the following 37 communities experienced change:** Cadillac, Fremont, Grant, White Cloud, McBain, Lake City, Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Township, Ypsilanti, Dexter, Chelsea, Manchester, Saline, Marquette, Ishpeming, Negaunee, Chocolay Township, West Branch Township, Ewen Township, Gwinn, Allen Neighborhood, South Lansing, Northwest Lansing, Pontiac, St. Clair County, St. Johns, DeWitt, Holland, Zeeland, Eaton Rapids, Canton Township, Saginaw, Bay, Midland, Northville, Chippewa County, and Munising.

Projects implemented as a result of the completed assessments and funding include the following:

- Marquette Yellow Bikes Program.
- Regional Recreational Authority working to establish a non-profit to run Al Quaal. Recreational Area and Noquomenan Trail network.
- Project Senior Fresh.
- Smart Commute Week.
- Two new neighborhood farmers' markets.
- Development of a health impact assessment tool.
- Purchase and installation of bike racks.
- Development and distribution of walking maps.
- Creation of promotional materials that highlighted physical activity and healthy food opportunities.



- Purchase of educational and media kits to be used to promote smoke-free environments as well as school materials aimed at increasing healthy eating.

### Tobacco-Reduction Coalition Successes

The power of such partnerships has resulted in significant improvements on the way toward a tobacco-free Michigan. With the exception of the Youth Tobacco Act and the Michigan Clean Indoor

**Case Study:** The Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC) serves as a hub for neighborhood education and capacity-building. ANC offers activities that promote the health, safety, and stability of families and neighborhoods on the East side of Lansing. Activities include home repair training, health screenings, a community garden, and a weekly neighborhood farmers' market. During the 2005 season, the market saw an average of 270 shoppers each week, had over \$350 in Project FRESH sales (the WIC farmers' market nutrition program), and had over \$1,600 in EBT food stamp sales. ANC has been extremely successful in working from the grassroots level at improving the daily lives of local residents. Numerous grants have been secured as well as a "Cool Cities" designation by the State of Michigan. Public health practitioners have learned (and continue to learn) a great deal about reaching community residents by talking to, listening to, and assisting ANC.

Air Act, all of the following legislation passed since the 1990 Task Force recommendations<sup>1</sup>

- Restriction on smoking in publicly owned buildings and certain other venues. Michigan Clean Indoor Air Act—Public Act 198 of 1986.
- Ban on the sale of tobacco to minors. Michigan Youth Tobacco Act—Public Act 314 of 1988.
- Prohibition of the sale of cigarettes outside of original packaging (loosies)—Public Act 272 of 1992.
- Restrictions on the distribution of free tobacco samples through the mail— Public Act 273 of 1992.
- Ban on use of tobacco products in school buildings at all times and on public school grounds until 6:00 p.m. on school days—Public Act 140 of 1993.
- Ban on smoking at any time in licensed child care centers and child-caring institutions—Public Act 217 of 1993.
- Ban on smoking in licensed family child care homes during hours of operation—Public Act 217 of 1993.
- Increased nonsmoking seating in restaurants—at least 50 percent nonsmoking seats in establishments with 50 seats or more; at least 25percent non-smoking seating in smaller restaurants. Public Act 242 of 1993.
- 1993: Increased tobacco excise taxes (75 cents per pack on cigarettes; 16 percent of wholesale price on other tobacco products)—Public Act 327 of 1993.
- 2002: Increased tobacco excise taxes (50 cents per pack on cigarettes; 16 percent of wholesale price on other tobacco products)—Public Act 503 of 2002.
- Requirement of a tax stamp on all tobacco products sold in Michigan—Public Act 187 of 1997.
- Ban on billboard advertising of tobacco products—Public Act 464 of 1998.
- Smoke-free regulations in all worksites and public places, excluding bars and restaurants. in Marquette City (1998), Ingham County (February 2002), Washtenaw County (November 2002), and Genesee County (November 2003).
- Over 40 local ordinances and policies that address smoke-free environments, vending machines, tobacco advertising, and retailer licensing.



## SPECIAL-INTEREST GROUPS WORKING FOR POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Special-interest groups offer another rich resource for community involvement that can promote policy change. The following is a suggestion for establishing a “friends” group and for creating an avalanche of voices that local decision-makers simply cannot ignore.

### CAUTION:

Often the local health promotion task force or coalition (e.g., Local Physical Activity and Nutrition Coalition or Task Force) has members from local government agencies. Government workers may feel uncomfortable advocating for policy and environmental changes—even with careful training. That’s okay. Other special-interest groups, neighborhood associations, or outdoors clubs exist whose members are not hindered by any sort of political repercussions from vocal advocacy. Tap into these groups when creating your friends group.

The friends group should consist of motivated and passionate people. You will need to find approximately 15 to 50 people who are committed to the healthy-community cause. For the particular purpose of keeping the healthy community mission fresh in the minds of elected officials and decision makers, the members need only to remain persistent in their message for a short period.

The approach is simple: over the course of 50 weeks (omit two weeks for holidays), get a minimum of 25 people who are particularly interested in an issue to commit to the following five tasks:

- Write two letters/year.
- Make two phone calls/year.
- Send two e-mails/year.
- Attend and speak at two public meetings/year.
- Make two visits with policy- or decision-makers/year.

To be successful, the message conveyed in each of these methods should be consistent, yet different enough not to sound like a form letter. The real work will come in coordinating the timing of this effort. The coordinator of this approach should have a large calendar and write in each volunteer’s name, task, and appropriate date. It also helps to provide some volunteer training to the friends groups. This can be as simple as an overview of the local political process or as complex as bicycle and pedestrian design elements. The training should be appropriately geared toward the skill level of the group, as well as the ultimate goal.

### HERE’S A TIP:

The success of this approach rests in the simple truth that elected officials and decision-makers rarely hear the same message from this many people over an extended length of time. This approach creates the effect of an “avalanche.” In addition, your more sensitive government employees are not the ones making contacts. That’s the beauty of a friends group; they are essentially friends of your cause who want to make their voices heard. You simply furnish the megaphone.

This approach has a relatively low volunteer burden, but it can create an avalanche of voices, sustained momentum, and, ultimately, change.

### **Advisory Boards and Commissions**

One way to institutionalize healthy-communities elements into a community is to create a government-appointed advisory board or commission that focuses on bicycle or pedestrian issues,

community gardens or farmers' markets, or both. As a general rule, it is best for the advisory board to limit its work either to bicycle or pedestrian interests or to community gardens or farmers' markets. The experience of numerous communities illustrates the importance of having separate advisory boards. One interest dominates the other when the two exist as one. Keep in mind, however, that these boards are typically begun as bicycle and pedestrian committees and evolve into separate boards later.

### HERE'S A TIP:

The creation of a full-time coordinator position within local government that focuses on bicycle and pedestrian needs as they relate to all other transportation modes, planning, and city operations is ideal. A typical job description would include both bicycle and pedestrian responsibilities, serving as staff to both bicycle and pedestrian advisory boards.

In creating such a board, it is vital that there be municipal support and buy-in. In other words, make it the "Mayor's Pedestrian Advisory Board" or the "County Farmers' Market Committee." Such an advisory board will carry more weight and potentially have more influence over local policy decisions than a board created by an advocacy group that has not been endorsed by a local government organization. Additionally, an advisory board is likely to outlast individual politicians, making it a sustainable entity that addresses bicycle/pedestrian needs.

### HERE'S A TIP:

Forming an advisory board ordained by the local governing body is likely to be a long-range goal. As a first step, however, work toward establishing a more informal bicycle or pedestrian Committee modeled after the suggestions included here. That way, when the timing is right to pursue institutionalizing an advisory board, there is a structure already set up with knowledgeable, interested candidates.

Government support and endorsement can carry inherent pitfalls, namely—e.g., the membership of the board can become very political. It is critical to the success of these boards that membership is controlled by staff dedicated to the same interests. This positive control over membership can manifest itself in the **interview process**, in recruitment and advertising, and in the writing of the board bylaws. Successful pedestrian and bicycle programs also rely on **effective meeting practices** and **strategic planning**. Suggest the following processes to your trusted elected official or decision-maker.

### Neighborhood Tobacco-Reduction Coalitions

The role of **local tobacco-reduction coalitions** was included in Chapter 3. In a community where a coalition does not exist, community members can develop a coalition or advisory board that is interested in protecting community members' health, specifically through increasing local smoke-free policies where people are physically active, or in other places that have the potential to protect a large percentage of the community, such as school districts, colleges/universities, worksites and other public places.

### Interview Process

To attract quality members, advertise in local newspapers and neighborhood and faith-organization newsletters, and post information around town. Get the word out as much as possible. Ideally, the demographics of the board should match that of the community.



Request that interested individuals submit a resume and cover letter explaining their interest. Look for a history of volunteerism and the level of effort that the applicant generally gives to projects. Avoid the “professional” volunteer: a person’s ability to balance personal and professional interests is a good characteristic of a potential member. These people will generally be willing to learn something new.

### **Boards, Staff Responsibilities, and Effective Meetings**

**Advisory boards** seem to function best at 9 to 12 members, with rotating three-year terms. Elect an effective chair from the beginning, and have a grooming process for the next one in place when it’s time to elect another. You may want to consider longer terms for the chair to avoid confusion in leadership. Regardless of membership or chairs, it is imperative that staff provide training so that people understand what they are there to do. Strive for a conference or a retreat every other year that provides education, inspiration, new information and designs, outside speakers, and opportunity for team-building. Ideally, this training will provide a framework that staff can then build on throughout the year.

**Staff responsibilities** are important to understand on the front end. A staff person dedicated to this board, must set clear boundaries. Staff should serve in a rather limited role, yet one that allows the members to do their work most effectively. One example: avoid letter-writing or taking notes/minutes for the board, but do assist in getting guest speakers for the meetings. Staff often works with the chair to design effective and productive meetings.

Staff can include the bicycle and pedestrian coordinator, a health department employee assigned to work on healthy communities, or a nonprofit staff person who has formed a more informal physical activity and nutrition committee.

The key to successful and **effective meetings** is to make each one important. Outside presenters, presentations by board members about particular projects, and a discussion of a timely issue all make meetings important. Typically, staff will have an idea of timing and relevance that should be used to assist the chair in setting the agenda. Yet,, staff should not dictate which topic should take precedence, but rather present options to the chair or other leaders on the board, who then make the decisions as to the topic and/or invited guest.

#### **HERE’S A TIP:**

##### **The 3 Ps: Plans, Projects, and Policies**

All can be short-, medium-, or long-term efforts and all can and should be parallel processes. The 3 Ps provide focus for the board and, ultimately, change for the community.

- Plans:** Comprehensive land use plans, transportation plans, bicycle and pedestrian plan that includes healthy-community elements.
- Projects:** Capital projects, often bid out to contractors (e.g., intersection redesign)
- Policy:** Revise design guidelines to be more bicycle- or pedestrian-friendly; sidewalk requirements for all-new development.

To ensure a positive experience, staff should assist in order to develop a presentation that works for everyone. Make the speakers comfortable, assuring them that they won’t be “on their own” if the board has tough questions or sensitive issues surface. When the experience is a positive one, an equally positive reputation develops for the board. As a result, other speakers will be more inclined to accept invitations or even request to come before the board.



### Priorities and the 3 Ps

Prioritizing projects contributes to effective meetings, but this sort of strategic planning merits added attention as a successful approach to achieving sustainable changes. Each year, the advisory board should determine its priorities for specific and achievable goals—for short, medium, and long terms. Once the list is developed, each project or priority should be assigned to one member to track, influence, and basically “bird dog.” The members will inevitably take ownership of the project and report on that issue to the board. Assigning priorities to members lessens the burden on staff and enhances relationships between board members and key players with common priorities.

These suggestions for working with the community will get you started on your way to fruitful partnerships and sustainable changes that will lead to successful creation of a healthy community!

*Information contained in this chapter was conveyed by Peter Lagerway, Seattle Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator and FHWA Pedestrian Safety Roadshow Facilitator, to Roadshow Facilitators in Training, Raleigh and Durham, N.C., June 2001 and the Community Tool Box ([ctb.ku.edu/](http://ctb.ku.edu/)). Any liberties taken with the material have been at the writer’s and editor’s discretion to suit Michigan’s needs.*

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mountains of literature have been written on coalition-building and community mobilization. Here is a short list of excellent resources.

#### EXCELLENT WEBSITES

##### [ctb.ku.edu/](http://ctb.ku.edu/)

The Community Toolbox from the University of Kansas Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development has been online since 1995, and it continues to grow weekly. The core of the Tool Box is the “how-to tools.” These sections use simple, friendly language to explain how to carry out the different tasks necessary for coalition-building. There are sections on leadership, strategic planning, community assessment, advocacy, grant-writing, and evaluation, to give just a few examples.

##### [www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com](http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com)

Local Physical Activity & Nutrition Coalition Manual: Guide for Community Action North Carolina Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Health. 2001.

##### [www.commcoalition.msu.edu](http://www.commcoalition.msu.edu)

Michigan State University Extension provides useful resources and information for new and existing coalitions within Michigan. This site provides links to resources, facts, and success stories that communities may find helpful.

#### EXCELLENT BOOKS

*From the Ground Up: A Workbook on Coalition-building and Community Development.* Edited by G. Kaye and T. Wolff. Amherst, Mass.,: AHEC Community Partners 1997.

*Getting to Yes.* R. Fisher and W. Ury. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

*The Spirit of the Coalition.* B. Berkowitz and T. Wolff. American Public Health Association, 2000. [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org).

<sup>1</sup> Tobacco-Free Michigan: A Five Year Strategic Plan for Tobacco Use Prevention and Reduction 2003–2008.